

The Position of Nursing in France.

By ANNA HAMILTON, M.D.

The third National Congress for Public and Private Charities in France, which took place this year in Bordeaux from June 1st to 7th, had chosen four subjects to be discussed, namely:—

1. Methodical charity, practical ways of assisting public and private charities.
2. Help and education of feeble-minded and otherwise physically defective children.
3. Professional instruction and position of the nursing staff of hospitals.
4. Help to the able but aged who cannot find work, though unwilling and unsuited to live on charity.

Each of these subjects was intensely interesting, but the third question was considered the most important of the Congress, on account of the actual efforts of the Government to reform the nursing staff of hospitals, mostly consisting of ignorant nuns, belonging to unauthorised congregations. But the general wish of the Congress was not to mention the dreaded subject of "laicisation," so as to discuss matters calmly.

But so great was the interest created that the largest hall of the Athenæum was crowded to the utmost for the first and last time during the Congress, and in the chair sat Monsieur Coulon, Vice-President of the "Conseil d'Etat," surrounded by a great many officials, amongst whom the Préfet of the department of Gironde and the Mayor of the town, who both are specially interested in this question.

The nurses of the Maison de Santé Protestante in their dark-blue uniform and English bonnets with white ties made quite a sensation on their entrance, and were very much noted by the authorities.

Four reporters on this question had been chosen by the Permanent National Committee. Three of them drew up reports and sent them to the fourth, the general reporter, who was to condense them in his, and add his criticisms and conclusions. The four reports were printed and sent to the members of the Congress a fortnight before its opening, so that they might be *au courant* for the discussion.

REPORT OF MONSIEUR E. OGIER,

Inspecteur Général des Services Administratifs du Ministère de l'Intérieur.

This gentleman, who does not seem to have any practical experience of hospitals in France and abroad, maintains that though schools for nurses have been opened in Lyons, Rouen, Montpellier, Havre, Saint Etienne, Nancy, Bordeaux, it has not been possible to get the better kind of pupils, such as those that English schools recruit.

The lectures have been attended by the nuns belonging to the hospital staff, the infirmiers (coarse male and female ward servants); but though small scholarships have been offered to outsiders, they have not come forward, and this leads the reporter to the conclusion that nursing is too objectionable a career, morally and materially, for nice girls to take it up—they will always rather turn governesses.

But Monsieur Ogier does not consider that these so-called nursing schools are quite different to the English ones; they only consist of a course of lectures given by doctors or students, a theoretical medical

teaching from whence the nursing is generally quite absent. One has heard in one of these "schools" a clever surgeon explaining in the minutest details the theory and construction of the thermometer, and never mentioning all the practical and useful details as to the way of taking the temperature! Of course, pupils living in town and attending such lectures once or twice a week, and called up for examination after six months, cannot know much of nursing! Sometimes they have been allowed to enter the hospitals, but only whilst the visiting doctor goes round the ward—and that has been called "hospital training," and supposed to be practical work! Doctors as well as hospital guardians seem to think that future nurses have to be taught like future doctors, and therefore suppose lectures and walking the hospitals the most desirable plan for them.

They entirely put aside the most important condition that able nurses should train the probationers. Therefore, nuns who have attended lectures, and their common lay helpers, remain just as ignorant as to the real nursing knowledge they ought to obtain, though in many of these schools they have passed the examination and obtained a diploma!

The reporter brings forward many statistics showing, for instance, that at Montpellier the Nursing School has recruited 297 pupils from 1898 to 1902, and that sixty-three diplomas have been delivered, and yet the nursing staff is not improved.

I witnessed once such an examination for the diploma, and wondered who was to be pitied most, the candidate or the professor; anyhow it was dismally ludicrous.

The conclusions of Monsieur Ogier are that perhaps if the nurses (*infirmières* and *infirmiers*) were paid more a better kind would be obtained; he also proposes that they should no longer be considered like servants, and that their dormitories should be improved; finally, that they should not be liable to be suddenly dismissed by the guardian in charge,* like the servants, and that pensions should be provided for them.

The second report which it was my lot to draw up has already been kindly summarised in the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING on May 30th last.

REPORT OF DR. J. M. DURAND,

Physician of the Bordeaux Civil Hospitals.

This reporter declares that, knowing little about other hospitals, he will only describe how matters stand at Bordeaux.

He says that nuns here go round with the visiting doctor, report to him about the patients, listen to his prescriptions, see that they are attended to, take temperatures, manage all the housekeeping, and go round every two hours to see if the patients want anything at night; therefore are the only nurses.

But, to my knowledge, this is how matters really stand: Nuns keep well out of the group of medical students crowding round the bed, mostly knitting or looking elsewhere; the doctors' prescriptions are written down by one of the "externes"† for the

* The guardian in charge, or "Administrateur de Service," changes every week or fortnight, according to the custom, which may differ from one town to another. He rules it entirely during his time, and has nothing to say afterwards—a most awkward, unsatisfactory arrangement, as each guardian has his own peculiar ideas as to hospital management!

† Medical students having been through a competition to obtain the post. The "externes" are paid, have to attend the hospital every morning and do many things that are left to the nurse in England.

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